

**Melksham Link Waterway, Pedestrian and Off-road  
Cycle Routes**

**DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT**

Version 1.6 August 1<sup>st</sup> 2012

Document Control

Version : Final V 1.6

Date: August 1<sup>st</sup> 2012

Author : Ken Oliver Wiltshire Council

Approval : John Laverick Wilts & Berks Canal Trust

## **Melksham Link Waterway, Pedestrian and Off-road Cycle Routes**

### **DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT**

#### **1. Summary**

##### **1.1 The key project elements include:-**

Construction of approximately 3km of new Waterway, Pedestrian and off-road cycle route from the Kennet & Avon Canal at Semington to the River Avon in Melksham including:

3 wide locks, pedestrian bridges, and two new road bridge structures allowing improved vehicular access to Berryfield.

A new weir structure in the River Avon (raising retained water level by 0.5m) to allow navigable water depth through the town with appropriate dredging.

A new safe crossing for pedestrians and cyclists under the A350 at Challymead allowing access to the countryside from the town centre.

A new narrow lock and associated hydro power installation adjacent to the existing weir above Town Bridge.

Installation of visitor mooring facilities.

#### **2. Policy**

2.1 The Government Policy for Canal Restoration is outlined in the Defra policy document 'Waterways for Tomorrow' and British Waterways 'Vision 2025'. Planning policy for waterway restoration was contained in Planning Policy Guidance 13 for Transport. Planning Policy Statement 7 Sustainable Development in Rural Areas is also applicable in this location. These PPG & PPS's have been superseded by the National Planning Policy Framework and in this context the Melksham Link will deliver or enable sustainable development by delivering economic, social, and environmental benefit.



[Image illustrative only of concept - landscape detail to be confirmed - not to scale]

2.2 Wiltshire planning policy for this site currently relies on the saved Local Plan for West Wiltshire District and The Tourism and Recreation Development Plan Document. The Project accords with key policies of the Local Plan and DPD:

C1 ii): Is community based, so promotes inclusive communities and access to infrastructure, and the countryside.

C1 iii) and C3 i): Protects and enhances the quality of the natural environment.

C3 vi) and vii): Enables and encourages leisure transport by boat, cycle and foot.

The Project accords with Transport Topic Area Policy T4, by its focus on transport modes other than the car (see above).

The Project accords with Tourism Topic Area Policy TM2 with regard to the adopted route of the W&B Canal (which this scheme follows).

The emerging Wiltshire Council Core Strategy Policy 53 supports the restoration of Wiltshire's Canal network as part of the Green Infrastructure Policy and Core Policy 16 specifically support the Melksham Link project.

The Wiltshire, Swindon & Oxfordshire Canal Partnership\* (formally the Wilts & Berks Canal Partnership) Restoration Strategy for the Completion and Future Development of the Wilts & Berks Canal (2009) identifies this site as one of the key standalone sections of the waterway to be restored in that it will connect Melksham town centre to the Kennet & Avon Canal and the remainder of the national waterways network.

*\*For full list of Partner Organisations see Appendix A*

### **3.0 Site History and Context**

- 3.1 The Wilts & Berks Canal linked the Kennet and Avon south of Melksham with Abingdon on the River Thames, and was opened in 1810. The North Wilts branch was 9 miles long and linked the Wilts & Berks in Swindon to the Thames & Severn Canal just to the North of Cricklade. The Wilts & Berks Canal was closed by Act of Parliament in 1914.
- 3.2 Although protected in Local Plans throughout the rest of its length, the historic route of the Wilts & Berks Canal has been lost in Melksham as a result of development since the waterway was abandoned.
- 3.3 Since 1998 a number of options for alternative routes in Melksham have been explored and their feasibility tested.
- 3.4 The 2007 (Black & Veatch) feasibility report identified a route using the River Avon. The concept has remained and has been further amended to the one shown in this application. The variation from the 2007 scheme has lessened the potential environmental impact and has allowed further benefit from the proposal to the community in Berryfield.

### **4.0 Public Consultation**

- 4.1 The public and local community have been consulted at each stage of the iterative process of developing a new route. Strong opposition from Melksham Town Council discarded early options that did not bring social and economic benefit to the town.
- 4.2 The route using the River Avon was consulted upon with a wide stakeholder group as part of the production of the 2007 feasibility report. A number of adjustments to the design were made as part of this process.
- 4.3 Melksham Community Area Partnership undertook a further independent community consultation at the time the scheme was made a priority by the Wilts & Berks Canal Partnership in 2009. That consultation was on the current proposal and received wide support from the community and local businesses.
- 4.4 Further information is separately given in the Statement of Community Consultation

### **5. Proposed Use**

- 5.1 The project is to provide a route through Melksham for the Wilts & Berks Canal to connect to the protected historic line north of the Town.
- 5.2 The project is part of the full restoration of the Wilts & Berks Canal as an operational connecting waterway and long distance footpath and cycleway.
- 5.3 The proposed towpath will allow safe pedestrian and cycle access from Melksham Town Centre to Berryfield Semington and the Kennet & Avon towpath.
- 5.4 The canal corridor is part of the proposed regional Green Infrastructure network
- 5.5 To provide maximum benefit to the town from existing waterway visitors, the navigation standards of the new waterway, which includes a short length of the River Avon in Melksham, are designed to the same standards as the Kennet & Avon Canal. This will allow all craft, including a number of specially adapted wide beamed boats for the disabled, to visit the town. Beyond this point only narrow beam craft will be able to navigate further north on the Wilts & Berks Canal, it having been built historically as a 'narrow' waterway.

## **6. Development and Scale**

6.1 The project is to build a new waterway route and associated towpath and hedgerow and to adapt a section of the River Avon to make it navigable to canal craft . While acknowledging the heritage of the Wilts & Berks and Kennet & Avon Canals the Melksham Link is a new build waterway and will use 21<sup>st</sup> century technology and materials in an appropriate user friendly way. The use of modern technology will make maximum use of the available water resources and minimise energy use. Wherever possible modern construction techniques are used in the design of structures to facilitate construction by a mixed labour force including appropriately qualified volunteers.

6.2 The topography of the new canal route requires to construction of 3 locks to lower the navigation level from the Kennet & Avon Canal to the River Avon. Details of a typical 'wide' Kennet & Avon style Lock are included with this application

6.3 An EIA scoping report identifies the issues that will be examined as part of the planning application process.

The engineering aspects of the project are described in The Wilts & Berks Canal Trust – Melksham Link Project Design submitted with this application. This document includes sections on water quality and resources.

Further descriptions and specifications can be found within the following reference documents:-

The Grontmij Water Resources Development Strategy Survey dated March 2007

The Scott Wilson "Restoration of the Wilts and Berks Canal" dated January 1998 and updated to current design parameters.

The Black & Veatch 2007 Melksham River Route study.

6.3 A hydro electric power generator is to be included as part of the of the Lock structure that will be located next to the existing weir above Town Bridge. Details of a typical 'narrow' lock are include with this application as well as typical construction of a hydro power generating installation.

6.4 To enable continued access to Berryfield and to improve safety, the existing single main road access point will be replaced by two new access roads. The existing main road entrance to Berryfield will become a pedestrian only manually operated 'lift' bridge. Details of the proposed bridge construction are included with the application.

6.5 The project has made provision for boat and pedestrian access to the proposed adjacent marina site at Outmarsh Farm (this being the subject of a separate planning application). Existing Footpath routes crossing the new canal are maintained with minor route deviations. The intersecting towpath will offer further opportunities for access on foot or cycle and in addition provide a safe means of crossing under the A350.

## 6.6 Wilts & Berks Canal Works

Schedule of works:

Construction of 3 km of canal bed, and associated towpath, cuttings and embankments.

Construction of 3 wide beam lock chambers, gates and associated control mechanisms.

Construction of two new road access bridges

Construction of 4 pedestrian bridges.

Construction of a manually operated lift bridge.

Construction of new 0.5m high weir in River Avon below Chalkeymead Bridge.

Construction of new narrow lock and hydro power generator adjacent to the existing weir above Town Bridge.

6.7 The design of the new waterway has been carried out to facilitate appropriate adjacent enabling development.

6.8 In providing significant visual improvement along the River Avon corridor the scheme will also provide opportunities for further riverside enhancement.

6.9 The river section of the proposed navigation is subject to occasional high flows and 'out of bank' flooding events. In common with similar locations on other river navigations it may sometimes be necessary to close the waterway and towpath under dangerous conditions. Refuge moorings are included above the locks connecting to the river.

6.10 Part of the proposed route in Berryfield will use an area which is currently a children's play area. This application shows a proposal for replacement of this facility.

## 7. Access

7.1 The scheme enhances accessibility by encouraging the use of transport modes such as cycle, foot, and boat rather than by vehicle.

7.2 The physical access needs of all sections of the community have been taken into account and all appropriate parts of the project are disabled accessible except for a number of pedestrian bridges located where such access is prevented by their location on a rural footpath.

7.3 The Project where possible will encourage visitor access by existing transport infrastructure - not only roads, but also public transport and the remainder of the national Cycle Network.

## 8. Landscaping

8.1 Protecting and enhancing the Landscape within the project is a key objective and although the canal will alter existing landscape, such intervention is modest and the new landscape, including extensive tree and hedge planting, will be a key feature, and will be carefully integrated. New structures and features have been located to minimise the impact on the existing community.

8.2 The current landscape of the proposed new canal route is mainly farmland on relatively flat terrain, sloping gently down to the River Avon and is divided by field

boundary hedges and occasional native trees. The Melksham Link proposal generally will have low visual impact as the scheme proposes a canal either at ground level, in cutting, or on low embankment. Any visual impact of the scheme will be softened by the planting of new hedgerow and trees as indicated. There are a number of structures (no higher than 3m above current ground level) which will only be visible from locations close to the scheme. The proposals within the short length of river corridor will have no major impact other than to improve the visual appearance of the margins of the waterway. An additional low level structure (lock and hydropower generator) will be built adjacent to the existing flood weir. The new proposed weir downstream of Chalkeymead Bridge will project 0.5m above summer water level.

## **9. Archaeology and heritage**

- 9.1 On line searches have shown little impact on any known sites of archaeological interest. The project will be excavating on a relatively large scale and will keep a watching brief for any finds or indications of settlement.
- 9.2 Town bridge is a Grade II listed structure.

## **10. Environment**

### **10.1**

The Melksham Link scheme will provide many opportunities for creation of standing open water habitat with over 3 km of new open water. This will be particularly important for endangered species like the water vole. The waterway design also includes suitable habitat for marginal native plant species and the proposed accompanying hedgerow will provide new habitat which is a priority in Wiltshire's biodiversity action plan. Where applicable designs and environmental improvements have been used learning lessons from the award winning Heritage Lottery funded Kennet & Avon Canal restoration. Two members of the K&A restoration management team now work as key volunteer members of the Melksham Link project design team.

The River Avon corridor is a county wildlife site and to compensate for the 0.5m proposed increased depth of water over a short length of the river, careful bank profiling will replicate the existing marginal habitats, while accounting for the seasonal inundations of flood events.

### **10.2**

A separately submitted Flood Risk Assessment examined the effect of the proposed scheme on the River Avon, Berryfield Brook and Clackers Brook. The report demonstrates no worsening of flooding due to the Melksham Link proposal.

The water resources required for the proposal are detailed within the separately submitted Melksham Link Project Design. Water will be supplied for the section of canal to Berryfield from the existing resources of the Kennet & Avon. The Berryfield Lock will include back-pumping to minimise any water loss. The remainder of the canal will be supplied by pumping water from the River Avon, which with the exception of a small loss from bed leakage and evaporation, will be non consumptive as lockage water will be returned to the river.



10.3

The carbon footprint for the project when operating is minimised or non-existent as sustainable power generation of up to 50kW is provided from the hydro power scheme. The project design will also include use of mini/micro generation opportunities where appropriate for control mechanisms and monitoring.

The proposal where reasonable and practical will comply with the requirements of the Water Framework Directive. As water returned to the river from the canal will be derived from the river (and will be circulated by pumping), no significant degradation in water quality is expected. Appropriate dredging maintenance will keep suspensions of silt to a level compatible with that found naturally in the river.

## **APPENDIX A**

Full list of members of The Wiltshire, Swindon and Oxfordshire Canal Partnership.

Wiltshire Council  
Swindon Borough Council  
Vale of White Horse District Council  
Oxfordshire County Council  
Wilts & Berks Canal Trust  
Cooper Tires  
Nationwide Building Society  
Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce  
Thames Water  
British Waterways  
Canoe England  
Chippenham Vision  
Cotswold Canals Trust  
Cricklade Town Council  
Environment Agency  
Inland Waterways Association  
Kennet & Avon Canal Trust  
Melksham Community Area Partnership  
Melksham Town Council  
Melksham Without Parish Council  
Royal Wootton Bassett Town Council  
Sustrans  
The Waterways Trust  
Wiltshire College

